

Ryushin Shouchi Ryu is a school of Kobudo (ancient martial art) specializing in iaijutsu (the art of drawing and cutting). The philosophy of the Ryushin Shouchi Ryu parallels that of most modern forms of budo, (i.e. kendo, judo, and aikido) and entails cultivating the mind and conditioning the body through rigorous training for the purpose of improving the self rather than killing an enemy. This concept is more commonly known as fudoshin (不動心 – immovable mind), which refers to a state of psychological and spiritual equanimity. The name Ryushin Shouchi Ryu, selected by the founder Kawabata Terutaka Sensei (河端 照孝), means “cultivate firm and yet flexible spirit and body of the willow tree,” which does not lose its leaves even in winter, and contribute to the world through a calm mind and unfettered wisdom” (Shouchi can be translated as “shining wisdom”).

Ryushin Shouchi Ryu is based on a traditional swordsmanship that originated in the Kanto area but then spread to Kyushu and other areas of Japan. It is composed of lai (60 数本), Bokuto kumitachi, lai kumitachi, Tachitori, and Tantotori. The forms transmitted by this style distill the wisdom, discipline, and determination of a great many masters and accomplished men over hundreds of years, and it has been both extremely challenging and vitally important to transmit these forms correctly generation after generation.

Born in Tokyo in 1940, Kawabata Sensei has had an interest in Japanese swordsmanship since his early childhood. He’s made several significant contributions to both the study and practice of Japanese Swordsmanship. He began his formal training in 1963 in the ancient sword style Sogo Budo Shobukan, founded by his father. He also studied under the Uneo Yasuyuki Genshin (1913 – 1973), the 27th headmaster of Tenshinsho Jigen Ryu. In addition to training in kenjutsu, Kawabata also expertized in the collection and study of swords and their accessories. He has subsequently become an executive of the Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai (NBTHK) (Society for the Preservation of Japanese Swords) and is known as one of their experts on the subject, while also contributing to the foundation of the Nihonto Bunka Shinkou Kyokai (the Foundation of Japanese Sword Culture for the purpose of public interest). He continues to spread his knowledge of these ancient arts through the International Martial Arts Congress (Kokusai Budoin) and the International Martial Arts Federation (IAMF).

In 1975, Kawabata taught at the NRC (currently the Nihon Zaidan) dojo in Akasaka. He also trained many students at the ANA Haneda dojo and the Yokohama Municipal Fire Station. He later opened the Seiseikan dojo on the ground floor of the Sankei Indoor Sports Akabane at Akabane Minami, Kita-ku, Tokyo in the early 2000s.

In 2001, Kawabata Sensei established Ryushin Shouchi Ryu as a formal kobudo school to preserve and continue the study of Japanese Swordsmanship while cultivating the mind and conditioning the body through rigorous training. In 2008, Kunikazu Yahagi Sensei became the second headmaster of Ryushin Shouchi Ryu. In addition to his Ryushin Shouchi Ryu training, Yahagi continues his studies in Kendo and currently holds the rank of Kyoshi 7 DAN from the All Japan Kendo Federation. In his view, the wisdom and technique embedded in the Ryushin approach – which has been cultivated over centuries by successive sword masters – enhances his Kendo practice. Today, the Ryushin Shouchi Ryu is practiced across the globe with multiple dojos in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Japan. Every year Yahagi Sensei makes official trips to conduct training courses abroad, where he receives the warm support of his overseas students.

Our Head Instructor, Michael Martyn, first trained with Yahagi Sensei in 2013 while in Japan. In 2016, Martyn began Ryushin training extensively, earning his Sandan in the art in 2020. Martyn has been appointed Jun Shidoin, by Yahagi Sensei.



History of Ryushin Shouchi Ryu Iaido*